

# White River Contamination Report

As a result of the White River contamination, which occurred in December of 1999 and January of 2000, the 2000 Indiana Legislature passed a Non-Code provision in [House Enrolled Act 1343](#) (see [Appendix A](#)) requiring IDEM to prepare a report that includes:

- Comprehensive and detailed report describing the plans for restoration of the White River;
- Recommendations for changes to statutes, rules or procedures of IDEM to reduce the probability of contamination events;
- Recommendations for changes to improve the timeliness and efficiency of protocols and procedures for notice to affected entities if such an event occurs in the future;
- List of contamination events which have occurred since December 31, 1994, in which fish or other aquatic species were killed and in which civil penalties were imposed.

The following represents IDEM's report as directed by the legislature.

## **Restoration Plans for the White River**

In March and July of 2000 Department of Natural Resources (DNR) biologists conducted a survey of the impacted portion of the White River. The survey found that food sources for fish were plentiful and that wild fish had begun to move into the river from tributaries, backwaters, upstream and even from downstream. Fish were found to be reproducing in the affected area of the river.

Based on the survey the biologists developed both spring and fall stocking plans (see [Appendix B](#)). It was determined that stocking sport fish this spring and fall, before an abundance of predatory fish establish territories, would provide young fish with an extraordinary opportunity to thrive and grow into adults.

This spring, the DNR stocked the river with 1,937 adult game fish to spawn and 63,000 channel catfish fingerlings ranging in length from 3 to 4 inches.

In cooperation with White River Rescue 2000, a not-for-profit organization, a coordinating restocking of the river occurred in October with more than 300,000 bass, bluegills, crappies and catfish being released at 18 sites between Anderson and Indianapolis. An estimate of the number and type of fish purchased by DNR and White River Rescue 2000 follows:

	DNR	White River Rescue
Bluegill	64,000	
Largemouth Bass	59,600	20,000
Rock Bass	10,000	
Smallmouth Bass	37,000	5,000
Channel Catfish		132,000
Flathead Catfish		1,000
White Crappie		10,000

DNR biologists will survey the river next Spring to determine whether a multi-year restocking program will be needed. As with past restockings DNR will post updates on the Internet ([www.state.in.us/dnr](http://www.state.in.us/dnr)) of locations and times fish will be stocked, and documentation of species stocked at each location.

### **Recommended changes to reduce the probability of future contamination events.**

The White River contamination resulted from unreported and excessive discharges from an industry subject to the state and local wastewater pretreatment program.

Even prior to the White River contamination event, IDEM had begun steps to pursue delegated authority from U.S. EPA for the federal wastewater pretreatment program. Right now, the U.S. EPA is primarily responsible for overseeing local governments in Indiana that operate an approved wastewater pretreatment program under the federal Clean Water Act. This oversight is provided from a distance by U.S. EPA in Chicago.

Increased state oversight of wastewater pretreatment programs of local governments, pursuant to delegation, may reduce the probability of future contamination events.

Over the past year, IDEM has worked with the state's Water Pollution Control Board to incorporate federal pretreatment requirements into the state's rules. The new pretreatment rule was effective on November 17, 2000. Accordingly, IDEM will now submit a request to U.S. EPA to fully approve the state's pretreatment program. IDEM anticipates that U.S. EPA will approve the state's request by July 2001.

IDEM is currently increasing the number of staff devoted to the wastewater pretreatment program. By mid-2001, IDEM expects to increase the pretreatment staff, compared to two staff at the beginning of 2000. Six staff persons will be available for the implementation of the pretreatment program. The additional staff will assist in providing greater oversight of local wastewater treatment programs and for enforcing the pretreatment rules for facilities that discharge to a municipality that does not have an approved local wastewater treatment program.

In addition to an expanded wastewater pretreatment program, IDEM will be expanding the technical outreach and educational programs aimed at assisting municipal wastewater treatment plant operators. IDEM will be developing guidance for wastewater operators regarding the requirements in the new pretreatment rule and regarding the general operational issues of local management of a municipal pretreatment program. Our efforts will include both conference/seminar type settings and on-site visits at Publicly Owned Treatment Works with local pretreatment staff of those facilities.

The expanded pretreatment program and the additional outreach and education will provide better communication and understanding between IDEM and local pretreatment programs. However, it will not guarantee that incidents such as occurred on the White River in December 1999 will not happen again. The facilities and municipalities remain responsible to prevent harmful illegal discharges and to notify IDEM and others of any potential threat to human health or the environment.

As an added precaution, IDEM plans to work with the metal finishing industry to raise awareness about proper procedures for closing out an existing metal finishing wastewater treatment operation.

### **Future Notice to Affected Entities**

It is IDEM's policy to promptly respond to spills and discharges which may threaten the waters and/or wildlife and biota of the state. In addition to assessing such threats, and taking actions to have contamination stopped and mitigated, it is the agency's policy to notify operators of downstream drinking water intakes that a discharge has occurred. IDEM acted consistent with our policies in the White River contamination incident.

The experience with the White River contamination incident highlights the value of providing broad public notice when such events occur. IDEM has worked with other state agencies during the year 2000 to document a set of sound procedures that we use to govern our emergency response actions and to notify the public during such actions. The IDEM Coordination and Communication Plan for Emergency Responses is included as [Appendix C](#).

### **List of Contamination Events**

Tables 1 and 2 provide a summary of contamination events, which have occurred in Indiana since December 31, 1994, in which fish or other aquatic species were killed. [Table 1](#) identifies such events that have lead to an enforcement action and the payment of a penalty. [Table 2](#) is a similar list of such events that have resulted in DNR collecting natural resource damages.